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ABSTRACT

The objective of the Meeting Academic Success Needs of Re-Entry Adults Project is to assess information on re-entry adults in two-year colleges. This project description begins by determining the state of the art in lifelong learning, focusing particularly on adult enrollment trends and the purposes of lifelong learning. Secondly, re-entry adult students are profiled in terms of their age, objectives, backgrounds, employment patterns, urban vs. rural residence, sex, the number of people desiring to take part in learning activities, their interests, preferences for learning sites and school schedules, and reasons why adult students merit special attention. Thirdly, the role of two-year colleges in lifelong learning is addressed, especially in relation to their responsiveness, "open door" policy, community-based philosophy, and low instructor-student ratios. The next section discusses the findings of a project to determine the relative importance of selected educational needs to re-entry adult students, and to assist two-year colleges in providing programs and support services for these non-traditional students. Finally, ways of integrating lifelong learning into the two-year college context are outlined both in terms of dissemination and implementation activities. (JP)

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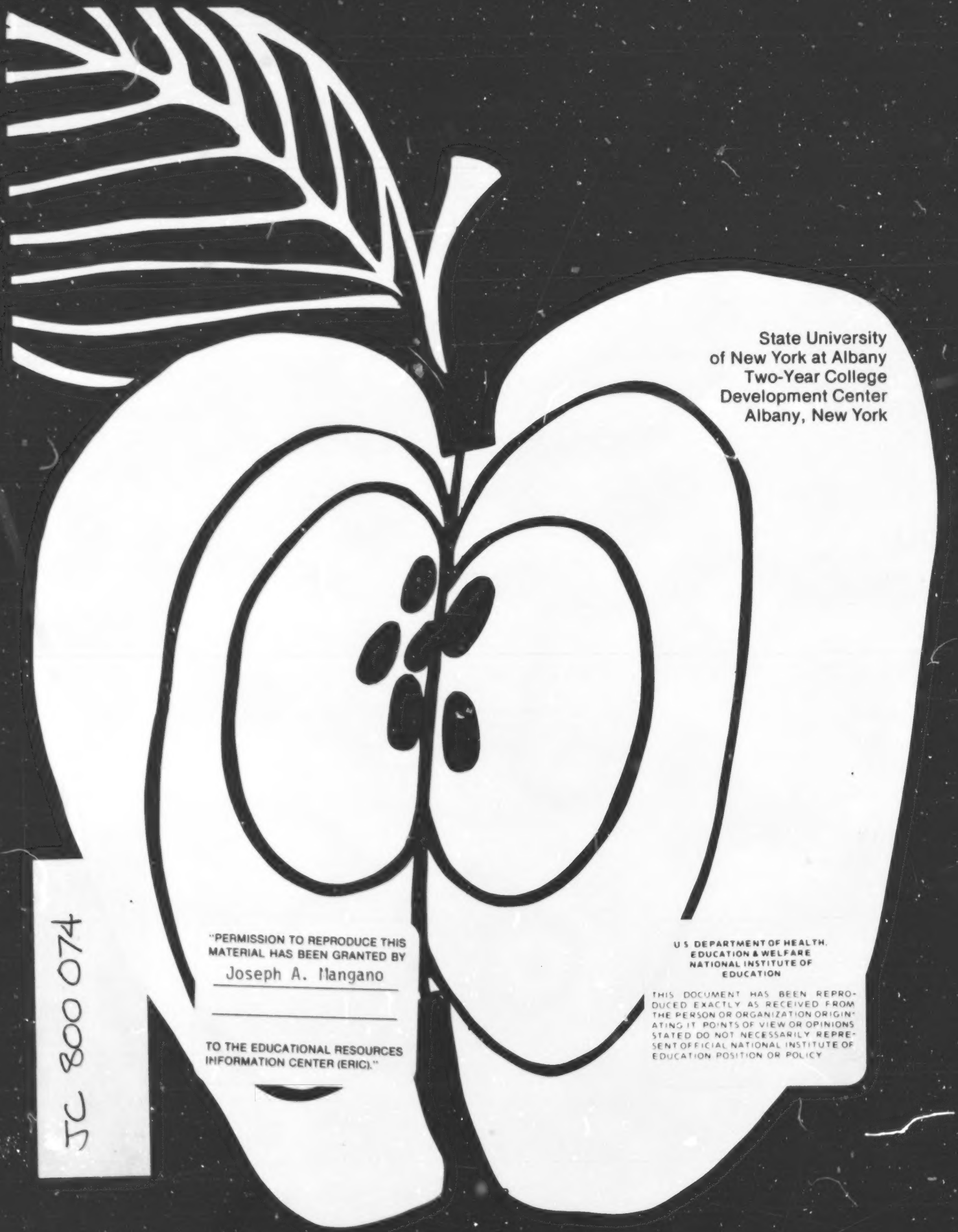

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Responding to the Needs of Re-entry Adults in Two-Year Colleges

State University
of New York at Albany
Two-Year College
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Preface

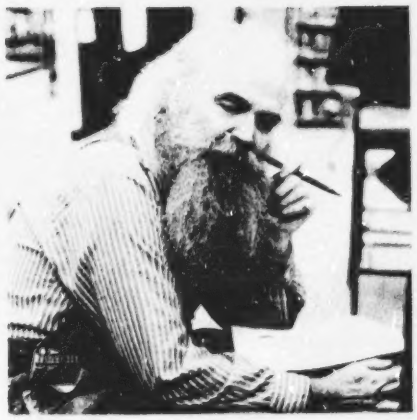
Adults re-entering academic programs often experience apprehension, disorientation, and failure. Out of school for five years or more with an entirely different set of experiences from those of younger, traditional college age students, these "re-entry" adults are expected to conform to an educational environment in which administrative regulations, instructional methods, curricular materials, support services, and even attitudes are typically oriented toward younger students.

Conscientious teaching and individual guidance enable many adults to overcome such obstacles and meet the demands of formal study. Although well-intended and beneficial to both the student and the institution, such efforts, for the most part, have remained poorly systematized and hence, sporadically effective.

The changing educational environment with its influx of older students presents a challenge to two-year colleges. This challenge is not simply to absorb adult students into existing academic programs, but to modify institutional efforts to integrate these students with the campus community.

In response to these concerns, the Two-Year College Development Center, a research and development unit of the State University of New York at Albany, received support from the Grants Administration Bureau of the New York State Education Department, to access information on re-entry adults in two-year colleges. Entitled "Meeting Academic Success Needs of Re-Entry Adults," this project offers the following advantages: (1) it is systematic in design and format, (2) it has been validated at six diverse two-year colleges, (3) it details a model for institutions choosing to replicate it, and (4) it provides a practical data base on the needs of re-entry adults in two-year colleges.

This brochure presents an overview of adult learning and describes this research project.



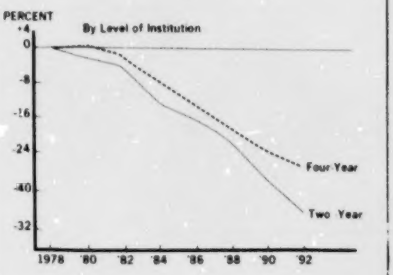
Introduction

•Lifelong Learning: The State of The Art.
•Who's Involved? Profile of The Re-Entry Adult Student.
•The Role of Two-Year Colleges in Lifelong Learning.
•Meeting The Needs of Adult Stuents: Can Two-Year Colleges Be More Effective?
•Integrating Lifelong Learning into The Two-Year College Context.
These five statements represent the focus of this brochure.

Recent years have witnessed an upsurge in adult college enrollment, and demographic projections suggest this trend will continue unabated into the next decade. The "hope that in the 1980's non-traditional students will fill the classrooms that are emptied by the contraction of the eighteen-to-twenty-four age cohort" (Bishop and Van Dyk, 1977, p.40) has made the adult student population important as two-year colleges prepare for the expected enrollment decline. A scenario, illustrating these demographic changes, has been prepared by the New York State Education Department (1979). It suggests that the enrollment decline for two-year colleges may be as much as 35 percent by 1992. The following graphs indicate the magnitude of the situation:

Although this scenario is a possibility, it need not happen. By continuing to attract large numbers of adult students to the two-year college campus, the severity of the enrollment decline may be lessened. Indeed, the re-entry adult is an important member of the local campus, and lifelong learning an integral part of the two-year college scene.

GRAPH I PERCENTAGE CHANGE PROJECTED FOR NEW YORK STATE FULL TIME UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT



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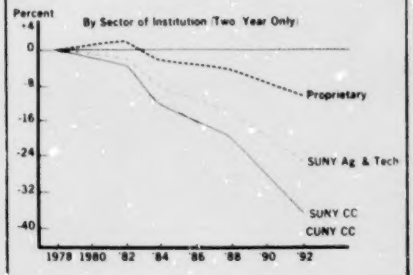


Lifelong Learning: The State of The Art

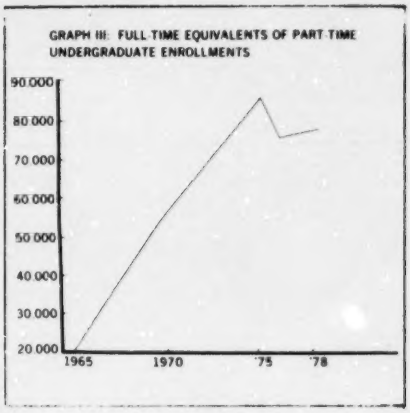
"I have found a great deal of pleasure going to this two-year college. If I were to pin it down to a single factor it would probably be the rapport attained through smaller classes and excellent instructors."

A Re-Entry Adult Student.

Historically, an individual's formal educational experience ended at 18 or 22 years of age. In the past 20 years, American society has moved toward a "learning society." Rapidly changing technology places special demands on all citizens. Social movements have swept our country. "Future shock," originally perceived as the shape of things to come, is with us daily. Changing roles of women, new career possibilities, and alternative lifestyles are here. All these changes have led to the growing realization that education is a continuing, lifelong process.

Increasingly, adults are sharing classrooms with younger, traditional college students. The mixing of generations in the classroom and the diverse needs of this student mix are creating changes on the campus.

Today almost 50 percent of the students on campus attend part-time, and the majority of these are adults. People of all ages are back in the classroom—learning new skills for a career change, re-adapting to developing technology, pursuing degrees to advance their careers, enjoying their leisure, exploring personal options. Whatever the reasons, the return of adults to learning activities has been tremendous. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, over 15 million adults participated in some formal learning activity in 1975. Colleges, high schools, community centers, businesses, and the military (just to name a few) are providing learning opportunities for adults.



Lifelong learning provides for continued educational exposure for those who need or want it. It is part of the fabric of our society and intricately woven into the two-year college context.

The rise in part-time student enrollments reflects lifelong learning's growth in New York State. As previously noted, it is mostly an adult phenomenon. Since 1965, part-time enrollments have quadrupled. The following graph illustrates this trend in full-time equivalents.

This part-time enrollment growth is indicative of the importance of lifelong learning in the fabric of our "learning society."

For two-year colleges, whose "average" student is over 27 years of age, the adult is already an accepted part of the campus society.

While adult enrollment figures have risen steadily during the past decade, educational planners have not experienced a comparable increase in their understanding of these non-traditional students. Thus there is a paucity of information concerning the difficulties encountered by adults re-entering an educational system shaped and organized primarily for the recent high school graduate.

Adult students are different from traditional college students, but most colleges have historically been oriented toward the younger cohort.

Whatever else their difficulties or shortcomings, colleges and universities are singularly ill-equipped to serve the needs of adults. Most campuses are handicapped by attitudes which have assigned adult learners to a second-class status, have relegated them to night or extension courses, to inferior degrees, to haphazard faculty, and more. On top of this, colleges have expected adults to march to the same teaching methods and institutional procedures designed for persons preparing for rather than already engaged in society."(McDermott, 1975, p.271)

The adult learners are here. Who are they? What are their characteristics? How are they a part of the two-year college scene?

Who's Involved: Profile of The Re-entry Adult Student

Adults pursuing credit and non-credit courses now outnumber younger students. This trend will continue as the baby-boom bulge ages. To be genuinely responsive to adult students, two-year colleges need to know more about this non-traditional clientele.

Nationally, who are the adult learners?
(Arbeiter, 1976-77)

•Adults who participate in formal learning experiences tend to be younger than adults who do not. Half of all adult learners are under 40. About 40 percent are in the 25-34 age group, about 45 percent are over 34, and only 15 percent are over 44.

•The younger adult often seeks credentials and credits for job-related courses. Those over 55 years of age are not as concerned about college credits.

•Adults who have had some college experience are more likely to be involved in formal learning activities than those who have not completed high school. And of college graduates, 8 out of 25 participate in adult learning sometime during their lifetimes.

•Adults employed full-time are more likely to participate in formal learning than those employed part-time or unemployed.

•Urban students are more apt to use the educational system than are rural students. Adults who live in rural areas are more likely to study at a wider variety of locations—for example, churches, community centers, and homes.

•Women have been enrolling as part-time students at a greater rate than men. They now comprise the majority of these enrollments.

How many adults want to take part in learning activities?
In 1975, approximately 260,000 adult learners, ranging in age from 18 to over 80, were enrolled in undergraduate programs in New York State. This constitutes a small proportion of the total population over 18 years of age. How many adults would actually participate in postsecondary education is speculation.

What are their interests?
The interests of adults vary according to age, sex, previous education, and home location (urban vs. rural). The New York State Continuing Education Needs Assessment (1977) outlined adult interests from several perspectives.

First, the interests of adults vary with age. Younger adults are more interested in credit and more frequently interested in job-related subjects. Older adults (over 55) prefer courses in recreation, hobbies, and personal development.

By sex, men are more likely than women to label their educational activity as "occupational training." More women then men study such topics as hobbies, recreation, and personal development.

By educational level, adults with a college degree are more likely to participate in some type of formal learning and to express interests in arts and crafts, home and family-life subjects. Those with some formal postsecondary education are more interested in leisure-time activities than those with less education. Adults with a high school diploma or less education are more interested in high school equivalency, building trades, industrial and technical skills, and business skills.

Rural residents have a greater enrollment in avocational training courses, while urban adults have a greater enrollment in general academic and avocational subjects.

Additionally, what adults learn is related to why they learn. Those studying job-related courses are seeking skills training, credentials, or both. Those pursuing recreational activities are filling leisure hours or developing new skills. The variety is endless.

Are all age groups served equally well? Are programs and services at two-year colleges planned to meet this diversity?

Where do adults want to study?

The preferences expressed by adults for learning activity sites are usually determined by convenience, familiarity, or the availability of tools or equipment appropriate to the field of study. In general, part-time students want local, close-to-home locations for their formal study. Few adults, at any age, are willing to travel over ten miles (one-way) for a course. Most under 55 years of age are willing to travel 5-8 miles for a learning activity.

When and how do adults want to study?

Adults prefer evening, weekend, and summer courses. They appreciate having diverse delivery modes (e.g. lecture, discussion, seminars, use of media), a variety of assignments for a grade, and standards as demanding as those for traditional students.

Why give special attention to adult students?

The essence of lifelong learning is education when people need and want it. Today many adults are seeking the education they did not receive earlier. Responding to their demands at a time when the traditional college student cohort is expected to decline makes good sense. Institutional facilities, services, and staff can doubtless enhance the participation of reentry adults in two-year colleges.

One significant response is to recognize and remove barriers to educational participation. According to the New York State Continuing Education Needs Assessment, the reported barriers include tuition costs, inconvenient class scheduling, home and job responsibilities, and lack of information.

In addition to these identified barriers, many adults report that they need help with mathematics and study skills. Their rate of attrition is higher than that of traditional college students. Thus, adult students need special attention to remain in college.

Adult learners are not traditional college students with lighter course loads. They are older, busier, and different. "Special attention" means giving attention to adults rather than forcing them into the traditional college student mold.

Are two-year colleges recognizing and responding effectively to the unique needs of adults? Are the barriers to adult participation in postsecondary education being broken?

The Role of Two-Year Colleges in Lifelong Learning

New York State has a large and diverse two-year college network—urban, suburban, rural; large and small; upstate and downstate. It is a proud system. Under the original charters, the two-year colleges incorporated statements about serving the needs of the local community. One such service is responding to the needs of local adult students, which two-year colleges have been doing.

Now, however, with traditional college student enrollments threatening to decline, there is an urgency in providing services for adults.

Two-year colleges are recognized as being responsive to the re-entry adult. First, the average two-year college student is over 27 years of age. It is easier, therefore, for an adult to come to the two-year college campus than to go to another campus which caters to the 18 to 24 year old student.

Second, the "open door" philosophy, a distinctive feature of two-year colleges, has enabled many people to attempt college—many attending successfully. Adults appreciate the attitude and support of two-year colleges. In the words of one re-entry adult, "The two-year college is fantastic for our area and for me. Without it, I would be working for a minimum wage at a menial job."

Third, two-year colleges are often community-based. Proximity to the school is an important feature. Many adults prefer a short commute to classes. The local two-year college is a convenient and familiar part of the community.

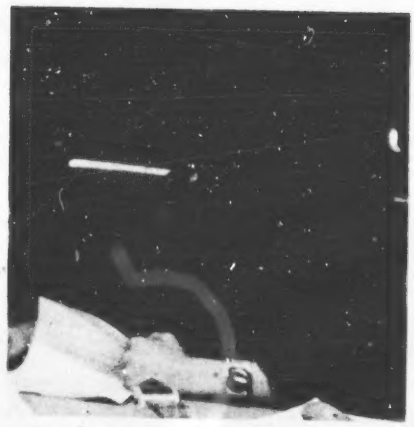
Fourth, in two-year colleges, many with low instructor-student ratios, the emphasis on teaching, and the concern for the individual make the adult feel welcome. It is easier for an adult to go to a college where they perceive others as peers. Many adults are responding to these two-year college attributes.

There are 57 New York State two-year colleges with eligibility for vocational education funding. Each is unique and contributes to its local area. When the Center decided to undertake a project concerning the needs of re-entry adult students, the sample of schools was important. The diversity of the system was considered. Six representative colleges (small ≤ 2,000, large ≥ 10,000) were selected to participate in the original study:

- Columbia-Greene Community College—small, rural, upstate
- Farmingdale Agricultural and Technical College —large, suburban, downstate
- Jamestown Community College—small, rural, upstate
- Jefferson Community College—small, rural, upstate
- Monroe Community College—medium, urban, upstate
- New York City Community College—large, urban, downstate.

The participating schools have learned much about the needs of their own adult population and have been able to respond, given their unique circumstances.

The role of two-year colleges in lifelong learning may be crucial to the adults in any community. Are two-year colleges responding effectively to re-entry adult students?



Meeting the Needs of Adult Students: Can Two-Year Colleges Be More Effective?

For effective decision-making, administrators need data about their institutions. Many two-year colleges lack the resources or the time to develop comprehensive data about the needs of their adult students. Under the sponsorship of the Grants Administration Bureau of the New York State Education Department, the Re-Entry Adult Project was initiated in 1977 by Joseph A. Mangano and Thomas J. Corrado of the Two-Year College Development Center. The objectives of the project were (1) to assess the relative importance of selected educational needs for re-entry adult two-year college students, and (2) to assist two-year colleges in providing programs and support services for these non-traditional students.

The research process consisted of several components: sensitizing campus leadership to the objectives of the project, forming steering committees, collecting and analyzing data, disseminating findings to the college community, and assisting implementation efforts at each participating campus. The first two components proved crucial to the effectiveness of the project.

Campus leadership—administration and faculty—set the wheels in motion. Their support enabled committee people to spend time on the project, to expedite surveying the students, and to facilitate on-campus dissemination of findings.

Steering committees, which consisted of members of the college engaged in programs and services for adult students, included: (1) faculty chairs, (2) Deans of Instruction, (3) Deans of Students, and (4) selected faculty from occupational programs. Their responsibilities were to work with project coordinators at the Center and to serve as liaisons with the college community in arranging for the on-campus student surveys, in analyzing and disseminating the results, and in coordinating the implementation of campus changes. Their work continues to be an essential part of the process.

The next two steps—collecting and analyzing the data—revolved around three survey forms which comprise the core of the Re-Entry Adult Student Project. The first, the Survey of Student Needs, consists of 75 items tapping the following five categories or facets of the collegiate experience: (1) Academic Survival Skills—basic tools of academic competence; (2) Personal-Social Development—those skills generalizable to a wide variety of situations, not typically regarded as curriculum determinants; (3) Instructional Patterns—instructional policies, practices, and attitudes that affect the student's academic performance; (4) Administrative Policies—administrative procedures that establish the institutional context; and (5) Student Support Services—institutional services that support and enhance the student's educational experience.

The second, the Survey of Resources for Adult Students, provides an indication of the college's perceptions of available services for adults. This brief survey compares the college's perceptions of campus resources to the reported adult students' needs.

The third survey, the Student Satisfaction Scale, is a 66-item questionnaire which permits the respondents to indicate the degree of their satisfaction with various aspects of the campus milieu.

The steering committees at each of the six participating schools administered the surveys to selected samples of faculty and staff (N = 199), younger (18-24 years) traditional college students (N = 561), and older (25 + years) re-entry adult students (N = 529). The survey results were tabulated at the Two-Year College Development Center and disseminated to the steering committees through site visitations and workshops. The dissemination and implementation of the project findings on the individual campuses are still in progress. The success of the project was—and continues to be—dependent on the committment of each institution.

TAXONOMY OF ADULT STUDENT NEEDS

Domain	Facet	Need Continuum[1, 2] First Order[3]	Second Order	Third Order[4]
Learner	**Academic Survival Skills** M = 3.59 SD = .23	• 4.06, 1.11 Improving my study skills[5] • 3.85, 1.16 Improving my test-taking skills	• 3.62, 1.21 Learning to give better oral reports • 3.59, 1.24 Improving my vocabulary skills • 3.58, 1.32 Improving my reading skills • 3.55, 1.19 Improving my writing skills • 3.54, 1.27 Improving my math skills • 3.47, 1.22 Learning to prepare better term papers • 3.45, 1.24 Improving my note-taking skills • 3.23, 1.18 Learning to use the library facilities	
Learner	**Personal-Social Development** M = 3.38 SD = .63	• 4.26, .99 Getting *A*s and *B*s in my courses • 4.09, 1.17 A place to study at home • 4.04, 1.07 Improving my concentration • 4.01, 1.10 Improving my memory • 3.90, 1.05 Acquiring a broad educational background • 3.89, 1.25 Encouragement from my family • 3.81, 1.24 Learning to organize my time better • 3.79, 1.13 Learning to set better goals for myself • 3.79, 1.14 Setting aside time every day to study	• 3.59, 1.24 Improving my motivation for college work • 3.53, 1.26 Improving my self-confidence • 3.17, 1.31 Learning to cope with failure	• 3.07, 1.19 Working with other students on class projects • 3.03, 1.32 Keeping up with other students • 2.96, 1.30 Fitting in with other students • 2.80, 1.17 Improving my social interactions with other students • 2.66, 1.25 Studying with other students • 2.65, 1.37 Reducing my uneasiness about going to college • 2.31, 1.13 Getting together with other students after class • 2.19, 1.20 Students my own age in my classes
Provider	**Instructional Patterns** M = 3.55 SD = .52	• 4.34, .92 Instructors who are personally interested in my progress • 4.04, .96 Instructors who are relaxed and informal in the classroom • 4.01, .98 Instructors who use many examples in their teaching • 4.00, 1.14 Instructors who have a realistic view of my responsibilities outside class • 3.96, .97 Encouragement from my instructors • 3.92, 1.03 Instructors who provide more than one way to meet course requirements • 3.86, 1.09 Grades based on projects, papers, and class participation instead of on tests alone	• 3.69, 1.10 Instructors who modify the course outline to satisfy student interests • 3.66, 1.02 Course objectives to guide my study • 3.66, 1.08 The use of films, tapes, and other audio-visual materials in a course • 3.49, 1.26 Being able to take re-tests to improve my grade • 3.28, 1.09 Courses with many class discussions	• 3.10, 1.17 Courses using many source materials instead of single textbooks • 3.01, 1.24 Knowing how I'm doing in relation to others in class • 2.93, 1.22 Instructors who follow the course outline very closely • 2.82, 1.05 Courses in which the instructor lectures most of the time • 2.51, 1.12 Instructors who let students decide what should be covered in a course
Provider	**Administrative Policies** M = 3.45 SD = .64	• 4.59, .72 Courses providing specific skills that will be useful on a job • 4.41, 1.02 Evening classes • 4.07, 1.11 Being able to obtain credit for out-of-college experiences	• 3.47, 1.36 Summer classes • 3.43, 1.24 Flexible requirements for class attendance • 3.36, 1.28 Three hour classes that meet once each week • 3.36, 1.28 Being able to take a variety of courses before deciding on a major field • 3.33, 1.26 Being able to take a course as an independent study • 3.30, 1.41 Being able to drop a course at any time without receiving a penalty grade	• 2.80, 1.29 Off-campus courses • 2.69, 1.39 Weekend classes • 2.55, 1.39 Being able to take a course with *Pass-Fail* grading instead of *A* to *F* grading
Provider	**Student Support Services** M = 3.14 SD = .69	• 4.40, .86 Speedy registration procedures • 3.96, 1.12 Preregistration • 3.89, 1.22 Evening and weekend registration • 3.71, 1.15 Being able to get academic counseling	• 3.68, 1.40 Job placement services • 3.64, 1.28 Being able to get occupational counseling • 3.57, 1.45 Financial aid	• 2.99, 1.46 A place to study on campus • 2.91, 1.37 Tutoring services • 2.79, 1.37 A campus snack bar open during all class hours • 2.77, 1.34 Being able to get counseling for personal problems • 2.62, 1.26 Campus activities for students with interests similar to mine • 2.53, 1.35 A campus tour during my first semester • 2.50, 1.24 Extracurricular activities • 2.31, 1.47 Child care facilities on campus • 2.01, 1.31 Bus service to the campus

[1] Item responses scaled from *Of No Importance* (1 point) to *Of Very High Importance* (5 points).

[2] Values: Overall Mean (OM) = 3.41; Overall Standard Deviation (OSD) = .58.

[3] First Order (item mean > OM + .5OSD).

[4] Third Order (item mean < OM - .5OSD).

[5] Mean, standard deviation, and item.

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The perceived needs of re-entry adult students

Twelve of the 51 items differentiating the student groups were given higher ratings by the older students. These items included: preregistration as well as speedy registration procedures; life-experience credit; evening, weekend, and summer classes and registration; and independent study courses. Re-entry adults indicated a high need for vocabulary and math skill improvement; younger students indicated a high need for extracurricular activities and for personal-social development. Both groups expressed a preference for concentration, memory, and study skill improvement; for relaxed, informal, encouraging instructors; and for a broad educational background with many courses providing specific job skills.

Part-time versus full-time adult students demonstrated differences on some items. The full-time adults' profile was similar to the younger students' responses. Campus activities, personal-social development concerns, and the availability of remedial services were noted by both groups. In contrast, part-time older students expressed a greater need for longer class periods meeting evenings and weekends.

Most items differentiating the sexes were given higher ratings by the adult female students. They expressed a greater need for encouragement and reassurance, for remedial and support services, and for academic survival skill improvement. Re-entry women also displayed more concern wth grading policies, with course objectives and opportunities for alternative assignments, and with scheduling problems.

To provide a systematic arrangement of these findings, the data have been organized into the Taxonomy of Adult Student Needs (see page16). This taxonomy displays a three-level hierarchy of the perceived needs of re-entry adults in two-year colleges.

These findings are interesting, informative, and empirical. They hold promise for institutions with adult student enrollments. Although generalizable to a wide variety of educational settings, individual campus replication would doubtless have the greatest impact for meaningful institutional change. With information specific to the individual college, more effective campus responses to these non-traditonal students can be realized.

Do two-year colleges know the needs of their adult students? Are they successfully meeting these needs? How satisfied are the adults with the services provided?

Integrating Lifelong Learning into the Two-Year College Context

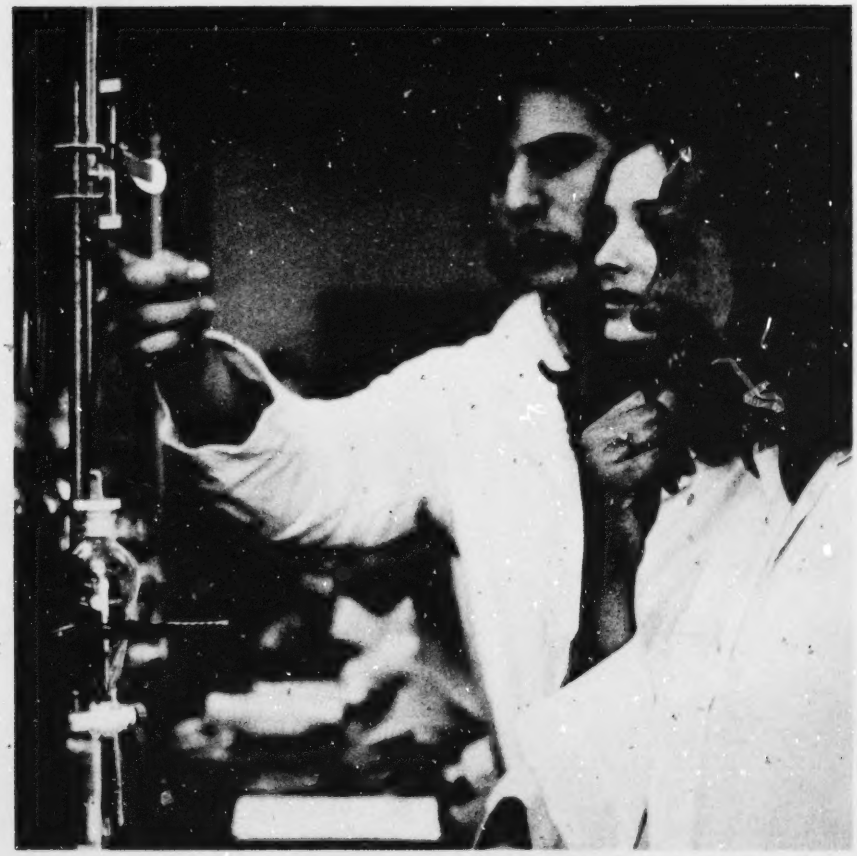
Traditionally, two-year colleges have responded to the needs of adults. This attitude augers well their position at the forefront of the lifelong learning movement.

The six sample colleges represented different stages in the development of adult services. Institutional responses were unique; institutional outcomes of the project (dissemination and implementation) varied from campus to campus. The flexibility of the project's research process accommodated this diversity, and served to monitor those modifications which had been introduced to improve adult student services.

On-campus dissemination activities included the following:
- faculty and staff meetings and workshops
- press releases to the community
- newsletter articles
- memoranda to the college staff
- long-range planning committee meetings
- word-of-mouth by steering committee members
- on-campus visits by the project staff

The dissemination phase sensitized the six campus communities to the project's findings. The implications of these findings were unique to each campus, and provided the basis for the implementation phase. The implementation phase served to impact the derived implications within the context of each campus. The following represent both current and projected implementation activities:
- life-experience credit
- reassessment of institutional priorities
- extended hours for developmental programs
- speedier registration procedures
- mail-in and weekend registration
- evening financial aid counseling
- academic advisement during registration
- information booths at community sites
- adult-oriented information packets (admissions, financial aid)
- diverse instructional modes
- diverse course scheduling and locations
- evening campus tours
- adult orientation programs
- staff development
- adjunct faculty workshops
- weekend classes.

Adult students are different from traditional college students. Services and programs successful for one group are not necessarily appropriate for another. To optimize adult educational potential, the responses by two-year colleges must be diverse, holistic, and matched to the changing needs of an individual's lifespan development. This posture will insure the status of two-year colleges in the continued growth of lifelong learning.



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